# Taking an artistic approach to ecology lesson

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STAFF WRITER

A group of Watsonville Community School students take a hands-on approach to learning about the earth's ecology by painting a mural about the rain forest.

About 20 students have picked up brushes to paint the mural on a wall at the school's assembly room. The mural depicts the destruction of the Brazilian rain forest, said Guillermo Aranda, a local muralist who is assisting the students.

Aranda, who has headed several mural projects in Watsonville involving students, said the rain forest mural gives students an awareness of the detrimental effects of cutting and burning large sections of the forest.

The design was drawn by Aranda, but students sketched the drawing on the wall and are applying the paint. Some of the students have never been involved in any type of art project nor have they attempted to draw or paint, Aranda said.

Fifteen-year-old Rocio Guerrero is one of these students.

"She doesn't have experience, but, man, she's got the eye," Aranda said.

Guerrero not only sketched part of the mural but is also painting.

"I always thought I couldn't do this," Guerrero said.

Working on the project has given students a sense of achievement and satisfaction, Aranda said.

"They see this wall go through changes," he said. "They are feeling good about doing this."

Aranda is also working on a similar mural at Freedom Elementary School and he teaches art part time at Ohlone Elementary School as a visiting artist through the county's SPECTRA program, which sponsors artists at various county schools throughout the year.

Aranda hopes one day to open a youth art center, where young people can learn about the arts.

The community school houses about 50 students and is on Freedom Boulevard. It is an alternative school under the auspices of the county Office of Education for students ages 12 to 18.

Most of the students have left other schools for a variety of reasons.

Mike McCollum

**Students Emanuel Alvarez, 12, and Evarista Cabrera, 17, and artist Guillermo Aranda work on mural.**